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ABSTRACT

In order to learn who determines what is available for children to read, in addition to textbooks, a study was conducted in which authors, book editors, public librarians, school librarians, teachers, parents, and children were interviewed. This booklet contains the results of the interviews and presents the author's overall conclusions, including the facts that while authors are the creators and children the re-creators, the others act as intermediaries who are aware of children, their interests, and their desired. (JM)

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SELECTING CHILDREN'S READING

Fastbacks 13

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INTRODUCTION

Some people contend that in today's technologically oriented society the need to read is not as great as in the past; others feel that there is now greater need for reading. Regardless of which segment of society is correct, ability to read is considered to be a significant asset and is, therefore, stressed in our educational system and in the labor market. That the federal government has funded various reading programs throughout the country, especially at the elementary school level, attests to this fact.

In the elementary school the basic reading skills are taught and hopefully mastered. The goal is to have children become readers—readers of both fiction and nonfiction, readers for relaxation as well as for information. Is the goal reached? For some children the answer is "yes;" for others, "no;" and for many, "yes" and "no" since they can read but usually elect not to read.

What causes these disconcerting results? The variables operating are numerous and diverse; and they are related to the child, teacher, school, parent, and society. There is, however, one factor which tends to be overlooked. What about the books, excluding textbooks, that are available to children? Who selects the topics or the stories? Who selects the particular style of writing? What books do children select and why? In other words, who determines what is available for children to read?

Although a definitive answer to this question is impossible, since people and conditions are constantly changing, an attempt will be made here to support the tentative answer that many people are involved in the selection of books for children: authors, book editors, public librarians, school librarians, teachers, parents, and children. Each fills a role in the selection process.

For this study a number of people from each of the above categories were interviewed personally by the investigator. The interviews were open-ended, geared toward discovering factors within each category that influenced selection; questions varied, depending upon the relationship each category had to the total process. The size of the sample was small by necessity; and, when the interviewer was working with the schools, availability of interviewees was a factor. However, within each subgroup, an attempt was made to interview a representative sample. The opinions of the interviewees will be presented in the sections that follow.

Authors[1]

The author is the creator from whom ideas flow. Without this prime source, a literature for children would not exist, for it is the writers who, in reality, determine what is available for reading. On the other hand, they do not choose who is going to read a particular book, story, or poem.

The act of reading requires an interaction between the writer and the reader. This interaction is of concern to writers. Hopefully there are potential readers who will respond to the elements within a literary work with the same kind of sensitivity that motived the author. Some writers have in mind a specific market at a particular moment and, therefore, write what they think will be of interest to that group; or they write what editors ask them to write or deliberately choose topics based upon what they think editors will accept. Others write what they are pleased to write and hope that an editor will publish it. These motivating forces create two almost diametrically opposed approaches to writing—one generated by market demands, the other, self-generated.

Regardless of a writer's point of view, the creative process appears to be the same. The writer responds to the world around him. He is a reader of life and, as a reader of life, presents for others a unique vision of the human condition. When writing for children, the writer needs to see life from the child's perspective and write about aspects of life that are meaningful to the child. He must love life and love people.

The ideas expressed by the writer are reactions to his own

observations, experiences, and research. At first these reactions are vague, inarticulate, and ill-formed. The creative process at this point appears to be a problem of trying to make articulate the inarticulate. The writer attempts to find a vehicle that can best express these reactions; finding out what that vehicle may be is a major part of the process of writing. The manner and mode of presentation vary from one writer to another; he may use prose, or poetry, or nonfiction, in addition to numerous literary genres. There exist, therefore, endless possibilities of subject matter, style, and theme.

In this early stage, part of the writer's work is to sort out and try to understand what really is in the mind since creative thinking does not proceed in a linear progression. The writer does not decide on a theme and then figure out the characters and background in an orderly fashion. Rather, things are happening all at once in the creative experience; everything is jumbled up. The theme and the ideas for a character, a setting, or an incident tend to occur simultaneously. All ideas must be sorted out. All must be thought about, at times subconsciously and at times consciously, during the incubation period. Suddenly insight or inspiration is gained, a pattern has formed, association of ideas has been made, all seems to blend and flow together. The writer is now ready to begin the actual writing, where each element is viewed critically and rationally, and refinement of presentation is attained.

The manner of presentation is not predetermined. Oddly enough, it is not the age level of the potential readers that determines the treatment of the material. Rather it is the subject matter that elicits a certain kind of approach, style, or literary genre. If the end product appeals to a certain age level rather than to another, it is seldom by design. Overly strict tailoring to age level, controlled vocabulary, societal taboos, and other restraints tend to cause mental blocks so that the writer ends up writing a manuscript that would not be readable for any age.

Writers need freedom if literature for children is to reflect quality. In striving for excellence, each writer pursues a form of expression compatible with his personality and his need to create. Some writers write for children because they are trying to come to terms with their own childhood by recapturing the

world of the child. Others are not trying to write to the child, but to the potential adult within the child. These writers are not trying to recapture childhood but are trying to understand adulthood. Writers differ as to whether they would rather stimulate the child's growing-up process or speak to the child at the point where he is. Generally, however, writers agree that most children's perceptions and sensitivities have not been jaded by years of living; consequently, these children easily interact with a book and live the experience which the writer intended. Writing for children is a challenge.

Book Editors[2]

Each year thousands of books, covering innumerable topics, are published for children. Publishing houses differ in the kinds of books printed; moreover, divisions within each house are responsible for specific types of books for certain buying publics. The editors interviewed were representative of the industry in that they covered the whole range of publications, from picture books for the very young to novels for young adults, and included fiction, nonfiction, prose, and poetry.

Prime consideration in the selection of manuscripts is given to whether the potential buyers will be from the trade market or the mass market. The trade market is geared toward specialized agencies that serve the public, such as libraries and schools, while the mass market is geared toward the public in general. Market demands, which seem to depend upon interests of people and trends within society, dictate to a large degree what eventually appears in print. Voice is given to these demands through feedback from librarians, teachers, and buyers for bookstores.

Since library sales make up the bulk of the trade market, the reactions of librarians are needed by book editors. Through working with children, librarians know what books stay on the shelves and what books go out. They know what subjects are popular with children. Librarians transmit to editors their own ideas about particular books; they also inform them as to areas in which new books are needed because of changes in school curriculum. Book editors gather reactions and discover needs by attending meetings and conferences for librarians.

In evaluating these reactions, the book editor attempts to maintain perspective, for he knows that librarians are individuals with their likes and dislikes. Some librarians do not like fantasy; others love it. When a really good book of fantasy is published, all the fantasy lovers go into raptures over it, while other librarians wonder why the book was published. The editor must also consider the geographic area represented; because of differences in public opinion, librarians in the Midwest and the South tend to be more conservative in viewpoint than librarians in the West and the East. On the whole, librarians are well informed about their field; their respected opinions and close contact with editors are an important factor in the selection process.

The purchasing power of the schools is another factor in the selection process. Education is a multi-billion-dollar business, and school districts spend large sums of money for books. Parents, too, are willing to spend money for educational books. Editors hope that their books will be recognized as supplementary reading material for enrichment in the various subject areas; if they are, sales both to schools and to parents will increase.

In the mass market, book buyers for supermarkets, bookstores, and department stores are most influential. In this market, instant appeal is crucial. Since this market is considered a "gift" market, sales appeal is directed toward parents and grandparents. Books must sell, and instant appeal means a sale. The "package" is the attention getter. The book must be big and full of color, with illustrations that are not too abstract—and with a "good" price tag attached. Since this is what the buying public demands, this is what the stores demand. Selection, therefore, is based upon both educational and pictorial value—upon the interests not only of children but of the older people who buy them.

What are the influences which lead to specific demands? To answer the interests of children would be truthful, but incomplete; such an answer ignores educational trends and the restraints imposed by society as factors in limiting, and as catalysts in creating, children's interests. Since children's books are printed mainly for a child audience, knowing children and their likes, dislikes, and needs is vital. Editors observe children, talk to them, and evaluate their own personal experiences as children in an attempt to find out how children respond, what causes

them to be moved—in other words, to discover what "makes them tick."

Three educational trends have had an impact upon the scope and sequence of the curriculum. First, great stress is now placed upon individualized instruction; hence, teachers and pupils need diversified supplementary reading materials. Second, the curriculum has been broadened to include psychology, economics, sociology, and anthropology. Within these areas, problems of contemporary relevance are explored. For example, the rabble rouser, Sam Adams, is a historical figure who has something to say to today's youth. Third, there is a continued emphasis on science. Content formerly studied in high school is now being studied at the elementary school level. There is a great demand for more science books for all reading levels, especially for the very young child.

Most editors feel that the schools exert great influence on book sales. Not only does the curriculum generate children's interests, but the educational philosophy, as reflected by the curriculum, creates needs that cannot be met through the facilities of the school alone, thus placing new demands upon library systems.

The restraints of society seem to determine indirectly the selection of children's books for publication. Since children's books are written, edited, and bought by adults, their content is never wholly free of adult and societal influences. The taboos and restrictions existing within any society subtly influence human behavior and human interaction. Children do not escape these influences any more than adults. Adults must realize the difference between the world in which the older generation was reared and that in which the younger generation will live. Situations that seem unbearable to one generation may not be unbearable to the other. What really matters in writing for children is the spirit behind the situation presented and not the situation itself.

According to the editors interviewed, most controversial issues can be handled beautifully and expertly in a book; they contend that it is better to allow children to encounter problems or issues in many different forms so that they may better cope with the complexities of living. Subtle restraints on selection are difficult to detect since they are usually deeply hidden and disguised. Editors, consequently, need to have an open mind in order to

weigh differing opinions and arrive at some judgment.

The demands of the market and influences operating upon these demands have been considered, but the editor's selection process does not end at this point. Other factors are now functioning—procurement of manuscripts, house policy, production costs, literary criteria. Editors must be acutely aware of and knowledgeable about these variables. Selection now takes on a more subjective aspect.

Some manuscripts are solicited, some are unsolicited. With unsolicited manuscripts, authors or literary agents submit material to the publisher. Some authors contact editors directly; others work indirectly with editors through literary agents. Since agents tend to know the interests and requirements of particular publishing houses, they can do a preliminary screening. If a manuscript has potential, the editor will make suggestions which the author can accept or reject. Sometimes the editor will publish a book knowing that it will have only a modest sale. When this occurs, the house may have previously published successful books by the author; hence, the editor shows a sense of responsibility toward the author who thinks that his book has something to say and is in its best form. At other times, the editor may be willing to work with an author who shows promise but needs encouragement and assistance.

When an editor senses a need for a certain kind of book and a suitable manuscript is not available, he may solicit a manuscript; i.e., he suggests this possibility to a literary agent or to an author. Most editors use caution in soliciting a manuscript; they will approach only an agent for whom they have respect and allow the agent to find a qualified author. Most editors of nonfiction feel that solicitation is probably the best way to obtain satisfactory manuscripts. On the other hand, editors seeking fiction tend to feel that solicitation is the best way to get an unsatisfactory manuscript.

Obtaining manuscripts is just one of the responsibilities of an editor. He is also responsible for implementing house policy, which determines the budget for each division and, hence, directly influences the number of books to be published each season. Considering total production costs and the cost of each book, the editor must decide how many books, which kinds of books, and

what particular manuscripts can be published. The number and type of illustrations to be included, if illustrations are necessary, also influence costs. Thoughts about all of these things are running through the editor's mind as manuscripts are read and reread, worked and reworked.

Whether a manuscript is solicited or not, or whether it fits into a predetermined policy pattern or not, all editors welcome a manuscript that causes them to say, "What a marvelous way of looking at this subject. I must publish this!" Quality is present.

But what is quality? Editors have a difficult time in defining the term. Quality has the following literary aspects: accuracy, relevancy, clarity in exposition of ideas, logical sequence of ideas, presentation of facts in an appealing fashion, simplicity, intriguing plot, beauty of language, humor. Quality means good writing; and good writing is anything that stirs the emotions, causes a positive response, recreates vividly whatever the writer sets out to discuss or tell.

But quality is more than the total of all these aspects. The quality book has drawn life from its author, from his experiences, from something he desperately wants to say. In the process of writing, the book has taken on a life of its own. It provides experience for the reader; that is, the reader becomes a part of the experience portrayed. A quality book enables the reader to project beyond reality, perhaps touching the deep thoughts that exist within his own subconscious. The book penetrates the very depths of the reader's perceptions to reveal something emanating from the depths of the author's experience. Although this something is indescribable, it touches the common humanity within us all.

Regardless of market demands, house policy, and production costs, manuscripts of unusual quality are recognized and published. Quality does not have to be sold—it sells itself.

Public Librarians[3]

Librarians were asked, "What one factor more than any other would you say determines your selection of children's books?" They answered, "What I know about the children in the area this library serves." Librarians feel that it is their responsibility to find out everything they can about the children. They talk with

parents, teachers, and children. In this manner, they discover the general atmosphere of the community and the activities and interests of the children of that community. Both factors influence selection of books to be purchased by the library.

Whether the community served is in the inner city or in a rural setting, whether its residents are from one ethnic group or several, whether the people are of low or high socioeconomic level—all of these factors seem to be less important than the kind of youth activities that are popular in the community, and the educational stance of the community. These two factors seem to have a major effect upon children's reading interests.

How the community views education, and the degree to which the schools interact with the community and with the librarians, seem to exert special influence on the selection of nonfiction books. The scope of the curriculum and the materials used in school have a definite impact on the manner in which librarians serve the children who use the library facilities. Since most school libraries cannot take care of all the specific needs of school children, demands are made upon public libraries. Materials are needed to obtain information for homework assignments, oral and written reports, and other school requirements. Even if no specific assignment has been made, discussion of a subject in school usually means that many children will come to the library and read books relating to that topic; new interests tend to be sparked by what occurs in school. The school curriculum, therefore, does influence book selection and purchase of multiple copies.

What the teacher does or does not do in the classroom affects not only the reading needs of the children but also the manner in which the librarian can satisfy these needs. Today many teachers are broadening their concept of unit work, allowing for flexibility in types of assignments, resources utilized, work method, and manner of presentation. The list of required books is disappearing. Individualized assignments tend to be more interesting and the number of titles available for a given topic becomes larger.

Some teachers read orally to children; some do not. If, through library story hours and related activities, an attempt is made to expose children to their literary heritage, these efforts will in-

fluence requests for books and hence, constitute an additional factor in selection.

The psychology of child development is still another factor operating in the selection process. Many librarians would like to become more knowledgeable about stages of child development; such information helps to indicate what the child can do, what he can understand, what he is interested in, and, consequently, what kinds of books he reads and enjoys. The content, organization, and presentation must be suitable to the child's stage of development. Librarians consider these factors when reviewing books.

Television and magazines also tend to create reading interests. And there is still another factor that people who work with children sometimes overlook. Children want to learn to read, in part, as the result of parental, societal, and peer pressures. When children come to the library, they want a book that they know they *can* read; some librarians, therefore, feel that the graded series books have a definite place in the library collection.

By working with children in discussion groups and story hours, by observing what they read, and by helping them select books, librarians have discovered that all children have pretty much the same interests as far as types of books are concerned. They enjoy books that are exciting and that relate to them as children; they enjoy reading about things that are familiar to them in their environment; they also enjoy reading about the unfamiliar and about the world of make-believe.

In addition to considering the child and his interests, librarians must give some thought to factors that could act as restrictions or limitations on book selection. Each person has a value system of his own that is reflected in his opinion as to what kinds of behavior should *not* be portrayed in books. When a number of individuals have the same opinion, they can work collectively to exert pressure. Librarians must consider the possibility of attack from such groups. Many communities are very heterogeneous; what will offend one segment of the population will not offend another. No one is forced to read any particular book; therefore, books should be available for those people who want to read them. This is true for children's materials as well as for adult materials. Librarians want to feel free to select books that por-

tray a wide variety of life styles and show children that there are different ways of looking at life. Whether the library is in a large or a small system, librarians do not want censorship. They want to buy, and indeed do buy, books that are acceptable according to other factors; and they are willing to stand behind their choices.

Another restricting force is the budget. Most librarians allocate available monies on a monthly basis. Regardless of the size of the budget, librarians must be discriminating. In libraries with limited funds, the problem is one of which books to select; in those with a more generous budget, the problem becomes one of deciding which books should be bought in multiple copies and how many copies of each. Consequently, what is ultimately available in a library is influenced by the amount of money allotted for book purchases.

All the factors discussed enter into the selection process. Moreover, during the actual selecting and ordering procedures, other influences begin to operate. Through a contract plan with the publishers or through gifts, library systems receive copies of many new books. Some large systems receive a copy of every title published for children, while smaller systems receive copies from only the major publishers. In a large system, a committee composed of children's librarians will do the basic examination of new books. Each book is read and reviewed; then committee members vote on whether or not they would recommend the book for all collections, as a token example, for a special collection, or for rejection. At a monthly meeting, children's librarians of the system, and librarians from smaller systems that are geographically close, have the opportunity to hear the reviews, see the recommended lists, examine the books, and make a selection of books for purchase.

The librarian is now faced with making final decisions. Professional reviews, which appear in *The Horn Book, Library Journal, Appraisal, Kirkus, Children's Catalogue*, as well as the reviews of the committee, aid in arriving at a final decision. The fact that a book is written or illustrated by a well-known person or edited by a certain book editor tends to influence selection slightly.

Looking through the book, however, is the greatest aid in decision making. Physically, the book should be appealing. The

quality of paper, clarity of print, and sturdiness of binding are considered. If there are illustrations, maps, graphs, charts, glossaries, and indexes, these must be accurate. In addition to accuracy, illustrations are judged according to correlation with text, imaginative use of the art form, timeliness, and color. Literary features such as exciting plot, realistic characters, accuracy of information (for nonfiction, especially), and naturalness and beauty of language are of special importance. And, of course, all of these must be suitable to the age level for which the book is intended. The librarian does not have time to read each book, but these are the points considered as the book is scanned.

Selecting books so that the right book is available for the right child at the right time is a difficult task. Although many factors influence decisions, in the final analysis selection is rather subjective. The ability to be discriminating seems to depend upon a librarian's experience with children and with their reading materials. As one librarian stated, "What selection finally boils down to is a really good, educated guess."

School Librarians[4]

The main purpose of a school library is to provide supplementary reading materials; consequently, the school curriculum is the most influential factor in determining what will be found there. Teachers and children come to the library or resource center looking for materials and information in a particular content area. With the current emphasis on individualized instruction and learning centers, some teachers are getting away from a textbook orientation. They are exploring other instructional materials, of which supplementary reading materials (especially in the nonfiction area) are but one. School librarians try to ascertain the needs of teachers and pupils and select books that satisfy these needs.

Individualized instruction originated as a child-centered teaching method; however, judging from the demands made upon the library, school librarians interviewed tend to feel that this approach has become content-centered. With content stressed, librarians feel that there is a tendency to neglect reading for fun. They feel that children are not reading for enjoyment but

to complete an assignment. Through observation, librarians have discovered that many children would rather look at pictures than listen to a story. They do not want to sit and read. Many librarians feel that children are conditioned by watching television, an activity that does not require the use of visual imagination. Consequently, librarians are trying to lure children back to reading books for fun and for escape. To accomplish this, children's interests need to be studied.

Through talking with children, listening to their conversations, and working with them in classroom situations, librarians determine what is of interest to children. Sometimes a school does an interest survey. Boys tend to like sports, hobbies, science, and animals; girls tend to like biography, animals, cooking, sewing, dancing, and romance. According to librarians, community and family activities, television, and commercialism affect interests.

Surprisingly, a school library can have books that satisfy curricular needs and that interest children; yet the shelves remain full most of the time. Children cannot read the books. All the librarians interviewed were most concerned that the children be able to read the books selected. In the inner city as well as in the suburbs, the cry is for books that are easy to read. Books may meet other criteria; but if the child cannot read the book, its usefulness is minimal. For children reading at lower levels, the books must have large print, words they understand, few words per page giving lots of information, and short sentences. As the reading level increases, sentence syntax can become more mature; however, at no level do children like to feel overwhelmed by too many words per page and too many pages.

The school librarian knows that book selection must satisfy the demands of the curriculum, include materials that children can read, and correlate with the interests of children. In seeking materials that satisfy these requirements, the librarian turns to professional reviews and library periodicals for selection aids. The *Wilson Library Bulletin*, *Library Journal*, *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, *The Horn Book*, *School Library Journal*, *The Instructor*, *The Grade Teacher*, and publishers' catalogues are some of the sources consulted. When using these aids, librarians tend to look for certain illustrators or authors, especially in the nonfiction field, where accuracy is important.

At this stage of the selecting process, the fact that a book is an award winner also influences choice.

Even though reviews are helpful, most librarians prefer to examine the books. Public libraries invite school librarians to monthly review meetings; school librarians attend book fairs, book displays, and library conventions where they can look at new books. Some of the books are read; others scanned. But whatever method is used for selecting a particular book, the librarian remembers what the teachers want, what the children want, and what she wants—that children read books.

Both the physical and the literary aspects of the books are checked. Since children have a difficult time handling heavy books, librarians look for books that are easy to carry. Bindings should be substantial; librarians steer away from publishers whose bindings are usually inferior. Illustrations should be clear, colorful, and not too abstract. In nonfiction books, accuracy in presentation of the materials is as important as currency. Literary quality must also be present. The plot should be exciting and fast moving; the language beautiful; the characters believable.

Before the final decision is made, the librarian must consider the budget. While scarcity of money typically creates one restriction, another restriction is administrative policy. Today school libraries are considered to be learning centers, with the result that available monies must be divided between printed materials and other types of learning materials. In some cases, the director of library services, curriculum director, and/or building principal may control both the amount of money available and its allocation. When viewpoints differ, this control becomes an obstacle as far as librarians are concerned.

With funds so limited, another factor that may operate against maximum efficiency is the attitude of teachers toward the function of the library. Librarians state that many teachers do not care about what the children read or, indeed, that they read. When a teacher is interested in reading and reads orally to her class, her children reflect this attitude when they visit the library. When teachers are allotted money to order books for a classroom library, some will give the money to the librarian to purchase library books; others will place an order with the librarian for fiction books; but, in most cases, teachers want textbooks or cur-

riculum-oriented books. Librarians interviewed expressed the wish that school libraries could increasingly become learning centers and that the interaction between teachers and librarians could become one of mutual trust and respect.

The school librarian has considered in her book selection curriculum needs, reading levels, children's interests, teachers' demands, and literary criteria. The selection has been made and, hopefully, adequate money has been designated for their purchase. After the new books are received, the librarian's role becomes one of a salesman. Both children and teachers need to be enticed and ultimately sold on certain books. Through book talks, oral reading, and displays, the librarian tries to become a successful salesman.

Teachers[5]

Most teachers seem to feel that reading books should be part of the daily activities in the elementary classroom. Reasons given for this opinion varied, but among those included were (1) to foster appreciation of literature, (2) broaden the scope of reading, (3) enrich children's experiences, (4) teach reading in a more meaningful way, (5) expose children to different literary genres, (6) help children understand the various literary forms, (7) teach composition, (8) calm the children, (9) create the desire to learn to read, and (10) generate the habit of reading. Reading to the children and maintaining a classroom library are the most common means of incorporating the reading of books into the classroom activities.

Of teachers interviewed, one-third stated that they read orally to the children daily; one-third, only occasionally; one-third, rarely or never. The location of the schools did not seem to be a factor. It appears that oral reading diminishes as the grade level advances, so that in the sixth grade very little oral reading is done. The complaint of all teachers was the lack of time in the school day to cover the essential curriculum areas; consequently, some areas had to be neglected.

In the teachers' selection of materials for oral reading, the curriculum is the most influential factor. Greatest consideration is given to social studies, science, and the basal reading program.

Teachers take the interests of children into account; however, teachers who read to their children daily feel that children will enjoy whatever book the teacher enjoys because the teacher's enthusiasm is catching. In the primary grades illustrations are considered essential, but in the higher grades this is no longer true. Influences operating to a lesser degree include the fame of authors and illustrators, award-winning books, and programs on television. The ethnic background of the children slightly influences selection for teachers in the inner-city schools.

In selecting books for oral reading some teachers attempt to keep a balance between fiction and nonfiction; some read only fiction. Various types of literature are included, such as books pertaining to science and social studies, fairy tales, biography, fantasy, and animal stories. In some classes, the time for oral reading is so curtailed that short stories are read exclusively. The team-teaching approach, according to interviewees, tends to restrict the availability of time for reading; in a self-contained classroom more time is available, thus the probability of reading orally to children is greater.

Reading orally is the principal way in which teachers stimulate the reading of books in the classroom; however, other kinds of activities were reported. A few teachers in each school category have children share books through oral or written book reports, discussions, and debates; others encourage the ordering of books from book clubs. One teacher allows a free reading period once a week when children may read whatever they desire. Another teacher bases seat work and learning center activities upon books in the hope of enticing the children to become interested in reading. The kinds of book-oriented activities the teacher has in her total program tend to reflect her attitude toward reading and literature.

Whether the material is to be used in an oral reading program or as a classroom library, the factors in the selection process seem to remain the same. The degree of influence exerted by each of these factors, however, varies with purpose of the selection. Collections in the primary grades usually have more books than those in the intermediate grades. Classroom library books are usually not part of the general collection in the school library; however, even when all or some of the books are from

the school library, teachers have been the prime selectors as a result of their requesting books of certain types.

Curriculum influences selection of books for the classroom library. Reference books and resource books that can be used as supplementary materials for science and social studies are needed, especially in the upper grades. Picture books also tend to be selected, according to their pertinence to the content areas. Books listed as supplementary materials in the basal readers are given consideration.

The classroom library needs to have books on all reading levels, with emphasis upon the average level of reading competency. Another very important factor in the selection of books for the classroom library is the interests of children. By listening to children, hearing what their experiences are, working with them, and observing them, teachers have discovered that interests run the gamut from fantasy to realism, from fiction to nonfiction, from riddles to biography. As children grow older their interests tend to shift. They begin to like mysteries, biographies, and historical fiction. This shifting creates a need not only for books covering many subjects but also for books of high interest-low reading level.

Some teachers feel that the cultural environment of the child affects his interests and needs. Holidays are important to children; teachers have noticed that children enjoy reading about each holiday as it occurs during the school year.

Approximately fifty percent of the teachers are influenced by the fact that a book was written or illustrated by a certain person or that the book was an award winner. For a few teachers the book reviews in *Saturday Review*, *New York Times*, and *The Instructor* are an aid in selection; moreover, the reviews presented in advertisements of paperback book clubs are considered helpful by all the teachers. Children are encouraged to order books from these clubs; some teachers allow children to select the free books that are given for a certain number of books ordered. These free books are placed in the classroom library, and many classroom libraries are expanded in this manner.

When ordering books for the classroom library or when selecting books for oral reading, teachers seem to look for the following literary aspects: simple but exciting plot, easy vocabulary,

descriptive language, uncomplicated syntax, interesting style, humor. In nonfiction books, they also look for accuracy, few graphs and charts, and currency. Illustrations are judged according to color, correlation with the story, and appeal to the imagination.

After weighing all the factors, the teacher decides what books she would like to order for her classroom library; however, there are some restrictions on purchasing. In some school districts, the teachers must order books from a list received from the central office. In some instances, the list contains mostly supplementary materials for the content areas and tends not to include newer titles. Teachers who want to order books other than supplementary ones and those who wish to order newer books view this requirement as restrictive. Another complaint is that only titles appear on the list, and titles often give no idea of the content of the books. Teachers prefer to have the privilege of ordering whatever books they desire.

Money is another restriction. If a teacher is given any money for library books, the amount is usually small; consequently, the teacher wants to get maximum value for each dollar spent. Many teachers feel that paperback books give the greatest value and purchase them in preference to hardback books. Other teachers buy library kits. Shortage of money causes other teachers to spend the total amount on supplementary materials since this type of reading material has the highest priority.

Parents[6]

The parents interviewed wanted to have their children read books; they appreciated the importance of home reading. Some of their reasons were: (1) wanting to help the child learn to read, (2) broadening the child's interests by introducing him to new experiences, (3) enjoying books with the child, (4) aiding the child with his school studies, (5) occupying the child's time, (6) enabling the child to maintain good mental health by providing an escape from reality, (7) influencing concept development, and (8) transmitting experience through the beauty of language.

When children are very young, parents are inclined to purchase more books and at more frequent intervals than when the

children become older. There is a tendency for books belonging to older siblings to be passed on to younger children. Even though books have been purchased, only three of the fifteen parents interviewed said that these books were the beginning of a children's book collection. These were parents from the high socioeconomic group.

Public library facilities are used by approximately one-third of the parents, who say that they take or have taken their children to the library to obtain books for school work or for pleasure reading. They hope this practice will affect their children's interest in reading. Another factor which parents feel influences the child to read is the example set by a parent who is an active reader. However, the majority of the parents stated that they hardly had time to read the newspaper.

One-third of these parents are buying books and taking children to the public library. The remaining two-thirds reported that lack of money restricted the purchase of books, or that they bought books only when their children asked for them, or that they did not have the time to read or to take the children to the library. Most parents want to help their children, and attempt to do so within their capabilities and means.

If and when parents purchase books for their children, the factors that definitely affect selection are the child's interests, his reading level, availability of books, and the price. The child's interests seem to be given priority since parents tend not to buy books unless they feel that the child will be interested in the particular topic or story. When children are young, parents do the selecting of the books; as children become older, they are allowed to make the selection. Interests are influenced by community activities, such as scouting and sports; by family activities and family interests; and by national holidays.

Reading level is considered as parents look through a book to see if the material is suitable. If the book is not available for scanning, they may check for the reading level in the advertisement. Because parents want their children to read books with ease and comprehension, they look for easy words and uncomplicated ideas.

Availability seems to be another key factor in the selection process as far as parents are concerned. If books happen to be

within view, especially at food markets and discount stores, the probability of purchasing a book increases. There is a visual appeal, the book is at the finger tips, and the price is not too high.

Most books that parents have bought for their children have been purchased through book clubs available through the schools. These offers are accepted because parents feel the books reflect quality since they are offered through the school. Brief descriptions of the books that arouse a child's interest are given, a grade or reading level is recommended, and the price is reasonable. Purchasing books in this manner is easy and economical.

Although parents indicate that they want quality books for their children, they state that they really do not know how to judge literary quality; consequently, they turn to the child's interests and reading level as guidelines. Additional factors affecting their selection include the parents' enjoyment of the book as a child, the fact that a well-known author has written the book, or, in some cases, that the book is an award winner. Television does not seem to have any influence on the selection process as far as parents are concerned. Newspapers and magazines influence purchases only through the advertisements for children's book clubs to which some parents subscribe.

Given the opportunity to glance through a book, parents will look to see that the words are easy enough for the child to read, that the story is exciting and of interest to the child, and that the illustrations are colorful, full of action, and not too abstract. Parents feel that the ability to read is essential to competing in the labor market. They want their children to be able to read and are willing to help them become readers.

Children[7]

When children select books for enjoyment, interests dominate. Everything else is of minor importance. From first grade through sixth grade, all the children could quickly tell the interviewer what they liked to read. Boys and girls in first and second grades tend to have the same interests, especially in animal stories. They read mostly fiction. At third grade the girls enjoy hobby books and continue to read fiction, including mysteries. The boys show an interest in nonfiction books and read books pertaining to

sports and hobbies as well as mysteries. Boys continue their interest in nonfiction, with science and biography added in the fifth and sixth grades. Mysteries are popular, and by the end of the elementary grades adventure stories and historical fiction have appeal for boys. Girls seem to remain interested in fiction throughout the elementary grades; however, by fourth grade some nonfiction books are explored, and in fifth and sixth grades interests in the area of nonfiction become more diversified.

From third grade on, school studies and assignments influence the books children select. If the child's purpose is to obtain information for an assignment, the book containing the information will be selected; however, if there is a choice of books, some of the aspects influencing selection of books for leisure reading begin to operate.

When selecting a book to read for enjoyment, children first go to the section of the library or bookstore where books pertaining to their interests are found. Title is considered by children from second grade on. They like a title that tells what the story is about and that hints of action. It must "sound good" like *The Haunted Pool, Fiery Eye,* or *Screaming Clock.* If the title captures their interest, they take the book off the shelf and look at the cover, where they want to find a picture that shows some type of happening which excites them. The cover being acceptable, children open the book and look for illustrations. Illustrations are essential in the primary grades but become less influential in selection as the grade level increases. By sixth grade children do not want as many pictures in a book; however, children at all grade levels prefer books with illustrations. Children like pictures to show humor and action. Whether or not the picture is in color appears to be unimportant.

At this point in the selection process, first graders will take the book if they like the illustrations. But from second grade on, the first page or a page farther on is read. If the words are too difficult, children will reject the book because most of them want books that they can read with relative ease. If the words are suitable to the particular child's reading level and the number of words per page is not overwhelming, the child looks next for lively characters involved in fast moving action. Humor also is appreciated. In the area of nonfiction, additional consideration is

given to whether the facts are presented in an interesting manner and are covered to the degree of depth desired.

If a book passes this inspection, the child will select it; however, should the child lose interest in the book during the reading process, he will not hesitate to stop reading. Evidently, the selection process continues in some form during the actual reading of a book.

Conclusions

Who selects children's reading? Is it the authors, the book editors, librarians, teachers, parents, or the children? "All of them" is the inescapable answer.

The author is the creator. The child-reader is the re-creator. The others are the intermediaries. The needs and demands of one of the intermediaries appear to have a chain effect. First, teachers through assignments and teaching methods create the need for children to use the facilities of the school and public libraries. Second, the children, consequently, need to have books that they are able to read. Third, children need and want books that pertain to their interests. These needs combine to become the demands on librarians and parents, and book editors attempt to satisfy the demands made by their markets. In this attempt, book editors at times influence authors to consider writing in a certain area. It appears that the school curriculum, readability, and children's interests are the major factors influencing both the teacher and the child as the important selection agents.

Children, as agents, tend to be unaware of what is functioning in their selection process, perhaps because awareness implies introspection. They deny the existence of any outside influence except the teacher through homework assignments. But they do know what they like; and it appears that teachers, librarians, book editors, and parents know what children like in terms of interests, as well as in the visual and literary aspects of a book.

How interests develop is a complex process and what creates their formation has not been revealed by this study. According to teachers and librarians interviewed, cultural identities seem to have negligible influence, but school curriculum and community activities do have an effect. Librarians would add television and teacher attitude.

Qualities that teachers, librarians, book editors, and parents look for in a book, children also look for. Although school librarians, teachers, and parents feel that colored illustrations are necessary, the children interviewed report that illustrations are necessary but that color is not a determining factor.

It appears that the intermediaries in the selection process are aware of the child, his needs, and his desires. In addition, they believe that reading ability plays an important role in preparing a child to compete in the labor market and to enjoy life more fully. Why, then, do we repeatedly hear that children do not want to read? Have the teachers, as important selection agents, overemphasized the content of the curriculum, not only in types of assignments and methods of instruction, but also in the utilization of time? Has oral reading to children been pushed aside and forgotten? Do children see their parents reading books? Have parents overlooked the fact that their influence upon their young children probably surpasses all other influences? How these questions are answered would seem to determine whether we are providing the opportunity for children to become readers and, thus, re-creators.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Five authors were interviewed: two Newbery Award winners; one writer of mysteries; one writer of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry; and one writer of nonfiction. Four of these authors live in a large city in the East and one in a Midwest city.

[2]Six children's book editors with offices in New York City were interviewed. Five editors dealt with the trade market, with three of them mainly concerned with fiction and two with nonfiction; one editor was concerned with all types of books for the mass market.

[3]Included in this category were two supervisors of children's work for two large library systems, two librarians from small libraries, and two children's librarians from branch libraries. The libraries were located in the East and in the Midwest.

[4]Four elementary school librarians were interviewed. One was a librarian and the library supervisor for the school district. The other three librarians represented inner-city, mid-city, and suburban schools in the Mid-West.

[5]Seven teachers from the inner-city schools, four from mid-city schools, and six from suburban schools were selected. Within each school category, the primary grades and the upper grades were represented. The schools were in the Midwest.

[6]Fifteen parents were interviewed. Six parents lived in the inner city, four in the mid-city, five in the suburbs. Their children attended schools in the Midwest.

[7]Sixty-nine children from first through sixth grade were interviewed. Five were from first grade; four, second grade; twelve, third grade; thirteen, fourth grade; fifteen, fifth grade; and twenty, sixth grade. In each school category and at each grade level, except for grades 1 and 2 in mid-city schools, boys and girls were both represented.

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